اِنَّ هٰذَا الْقُرْاٰنَ يَهْدِيْ لِلَّتِيْ هِيَ اَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ الَّذِيْنَ يَعْمَلُوْنَ الصّٰلِحٰتِ اَنَّ لَهُمْ اَجْرًا كَبِيْرًا

Quran English Translation and Tafseer

Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi

Surah 70 - Al-Maarij (The Ascending Steps)

سُوْرَةُ الْمَعَارِجِ مَكِّيَّةٌ

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

(In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate)

سَاَلَ سَآئِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَّاقِعٍ ۙ﴿۱﴾

(70-1) A beseecher besought the visitation of chastisement, (1)

(1) Some commentators have taken the verb saala in the text in the meaning of asking, and have interpreted the verse to mean: The asker has asked: whom will the torment with which we are being threatened befall. And Allah has answered it, saying: It will befall the disbelievers. But most of the commentators have taken saala here in the meaning of demanding. Nasai and other traditionists have related a tradition from Ibn Abbas, and Hakim hold it as authentic, that Nadr bin al-Harith Kaladah had said: O God, if it is really the truth sent dawn by You, then rain down stones on us from the heavens, or send down any other painful torment on us. (Surah Al-Anfal, Ayat 32). Apart from this, at several places in the Quran the disbelievers' this challenge has been related: Why don't you bring down on us the torment that you threaten us with? For instance, see (Surah Younus, Ayats 46-48); (Surah Al-Anbiya, Ayats 36-41); (Surah An-Naml, Ayats 67-72); (Surah Saba, Ayats 26-30); (Surah Ya Seen, Ayats 45-52); (Surah Al-Mulk, Ayats 24-27).

لِّلْكٰفِرِ نَ لَيْسَ لَهٗ دَافِعٌ ۝٢

(70-2) (a chastisement meant) for the unbelievers, one which none can avert;

مِّنَ اللّٰهِ ذِى الْمَعَارِجِ ۝٣

(70-3) a chastisement from Allah, the Lord of the ascending steps, (2)

(2) Maarij is plural of Miraj, which means a stairway, or a ladder, or something by which one may go up. To call Allah dhil-Maaij (Owner of the ways of ascent) means that He is Most High and in order to go up into His Presence the angels have to ascend many heights, one above the other, as has been stated in the following verses.

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلٰٓئِكَةُ وَ الرُّوْحُ اِلَيْهِ فِيْ يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهٗ خَمْسِيْنَ اَلْفَ سَنَةٍ ۝٤

(70-4) by which the angels and the Spirit (3) ascend to Him (4) in one Day the duration of which is fifty thousand years. (5)

(3) “The Spirit”: the Angel Gabriel, who has been mentioned separately from the angels in order to impress his unique glory and greatness. In Surah Ash-Shuara it has been said: The trustworthy Spirit has come down with this Quran upon your heart, (Verse 193), and in Surah Al- Baqarah, say to them: Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel, should understand that he has, by Allah’s command, revealed upon your heart this Quran. (Verse 97). These verses when read together show that Ar-Rooh (the Spirit) implies the Angel Gabriel.

(4) This is an ambiguous theme the meaning of which cannot be determined precisely. We neither have any knowledge of the reality of the angels, nor can understand the nature of their ascent, nor can conceive the stairways on which they ascend. Besides, about Allah also it cannot be imagined that He lives in a

particular place, for He is exalted and free from the restrictions of space and time.

(5) In (Surah Al-Hajj, Ayat 47), it has been said: These people are demanding of you to hasten the torment. Allah will never fail to fulfill His threat, but a day with your Lord is equal to a thousand years as you reckon. In (Surah As- Sajdah, Ayat 5), it has been said: He administers the affairs of the world from the heavens to the earth, and the report of this administration ascends (to be presented) before Him in a Day whose length, according to your reckoning, is a thousand years. And here, in response to the demand for the torment, the measure of Allah's one day has been stated to be fifty thousand years. Then the Prophet (peace be upon him) has been consoled, saying: Have patience at the demand for the torment which the people make out of jest and fun, and then it is said: They think it is far off, but We see it as near at hand. When all these verses are read together, what becomes obvious is: The people, because of their narrow and restricted outlook, measure the time of Allah's decrees by their own scales of time and, therefore, consider a hundred years or so to be a very lengthy period, whereas in the divine conduct of affairs there are schemes spreading over a thousand years each, or fifty thousand years each, as you reckon, and this measure also is only by way of example; otherwise schemes in the universe may extend over millions and billions of years as well. Of these one is the scheme under which mankind has been created on the earth, and a time limit has been set during which it has been allowed to function here. No man can know when this scheme began, what time-limit has been decreed for its completion, what hour has been appointed for bringing it to an end, when Resurrection will take place, and what time has been fixed for raising all men, born since the beginning of creation till Resurrection, from death simultaneously and calling them to account for their deeds. We only know to some extent that part of the scheme which is passing before us, or a partial history of the past ages which exists with us. As for its beginning and end, to say nothing of knowing it, we do not even have the power to understand it, not to speak of understanding the wisdom which works behind and

underlies it. Now the people who demand that the scheme be cut short and its conclusion be brought immediately before them, and if this is not done, they use it for an argument to prove that the universe has no end and conclusion. They, in fact, present a proof of their own ignorance and folly. (For further explanation, see (E.Ns 92, 93 of Surah Al-Hajj); (E.N. 9 of Surah As-Sajdah).

فَاصْبِرْ صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا ﴿٥﴾

(70-5) So, (O Prophet), persevere with gracious perseverance. (6)

(6) A gracious patience: A kind of patience that behooves a magnanimous person like you.

اِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهٗ بَعِيْدًا ﴿٦﴾

(70-6) Verily they think that the chastisement is far off,

وَّنَرٰىهُ قَرِيْبًا ﴿٧﴾

(70-7) while We think that it is near at hand. (7)

(7) This can have two meanings:

(1) That these people think it cannot possibly take place, and in Our view it is going to take place very soon.

(2) That these people think Resurrection is yet remote and far off, and in Our sight it is close at hand and may occur any moment.

يَوْمَ تَكُوْنُ السَّمَآءُ كَالْمُهْلِ ﴿٨﴾

(70-8) It shall befall on a Day [8] whereon the sky will become like molten brass, [9]

(8) A section of the commentators regard this sentence as related to “a day whose measure is fifty thousand years”; they say that the day whose measure has been stated to be fifty thousand years is the Day of Resurrection. In Musnad Ahmad and in the Tafsir by Ibn Jarir, a tradition has been related on the authority of Abu Saeed Khudri, saying: When wonder and amusement was expressed before the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the length of this Day with reference to this verse, he replied: By Him in Whose hand is my life, the believer will find the Day even lighter (of shorter duration) than the time he takes in performing an obligatory Prayer in the world. Had this tradition been reported through authentic channels, this verse could not be interpreted in any other way, but two of its transmitters, Darraj and his teacher Abul Haytham, are both weak and untrustworthy.

(9) That is, it will change its color over and over again.

وَ تَكُوۡنُ الۡجِبَالُ كَالۡعِهۡنِ ۹

(70-9) and the mountains will become like dyed tufts of wool, (10)

(10) As the colors of the mountains are different, when they are uprooted and they drift about weightless, they will appear like flakes of carded wool of different colors.

وَ لَا يَسۡـَٔلُ حَمِيۡمٌ حَمِيۡمًا ۱۰

(70-10) and no bosom friend will enquire about any of his bosom friends

يُّبَصَّرُوۡنَهُمۡ يَوَدُّ الۡمُجۡرِمُ لَوۡ يَفۡتَدِىۡ مِنۡ عَذَابِ يَوۡمِئِذٍ بِبَنِيۡهِ ۱۱

(70-11) although they shall be within sight of one another. (11) The guilty one would fain ransom himself from the torment of that Day by offering his children,

(11) Not so that they will not see each other, therefore they will not ask after each other’s welfare, but each will be seeing the other in agony and distress, yet will ignore him, being wholly preoccupied with his own torment.

وَ صَاحِبَتِهٖ وَ اَخِيۡهِ ۱۲

(70-12) and his spouse and his brother,

وَ فَصِيلَتِهِ الَّتِي تُـٔۡوِيهِ ١٣

(70-13) and his kinsfolk who had stood by him,

وَ مَن فِي الۡأَرۡضِ جَمِيعٗا ثُمَّ يُنجِيهِ ١٤

(70-14) and all persons of the earth, if only he could thus save himself.

كَلَّآۖ إِنَّهَا لَظَىٰ ١٥

(70-15) By no means! It will be the fierce flame

نَزَّاعَةٗ لِّلشَّوَىٰ ١٦

(70-16) that will strip off the scalp.

تَدۡعُواْ مَنۡ أَدۡبَرَ وَ تَوَلَّىٰ ١٧

(70-17) It shall insistently summon him who turned his back and retreated,

وَ جَمَعَ فَأَوۡعَىٰٓ ١٨

(70-18) and amassed wealth and covetously hoarded it. (12)

(12) Here also, as in (Surah Al-Haqqah, Ayats 33-34), two causes have been mentioned of a person's evil end in the Hereafter:

(1) His repudiation of the truth and refusal to affirm faith.

(2) His worship of the world and stinginess because of which he amasses wealth and refuses to spend it on any good cause.

اِنَّ الْاِنْسٰنَ خُلِقَ هَلُوْعًا ﴿١٩﴾

(70-19) Verily man is impatient by nature: (13)

(13) “Man has been created impatient”: It is man’s nature or his natural weakness to be impatient. Here, one should keep in view that at many places in the Quran, after making mention of mankind’s common moral weaknesses, those who believe and adopted righteousness have been made an exception; the same theme is being expressed in the following verses. This by itself explains the truth that these hereditary weaknesses are not unalterable. If man accepts the guidance sent down by God and tries to reform himself practically, he can remove them, and if he gives a free rope to his self, these become ingrained in him deeply. (For further explanation, (see E.N. 41 of Surah Al-Anbiya), (E.Ns 23-28 of Surah Az-Zumar); (E.N. 75 of Surah Ash- Shura).

اِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوْعًا ﴿٢٠﴾

(70-20) bewailing when evil befalls him,

وَّ اِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوْعًا ﴿٢١﴾

(70-21) and tight-fisted when good fortune visits him,

اِلَّا الْمُصَلِّيْنَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(70-22) except those that pray, (14)

(14) A person’s performing the salat necessarily implies that he believes in Allah, His Messenger (peace be upon him), His Book and the Hereafter as well as tries to act according to his belief.

الَّذِيْنَ هُمْ عَلٰى صَلَاتِهِمْ دَآئِمُوْنَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(70-23) and are constant in their Prayer; (15)

(15) That is, no laziness or love of ease and comfort, no occupation or interest hinders them from being punctual and regular at the prayer. When the Prayer time comes, they abandon every occupation and activity and stand up to perform worship of their God. Another meaning which Uqbah bin Amir has given of ala salat-i-him daaimun is that they perform the Prayer with full peace of mind, tranquility and humility; they do not try to offer the Prayer in a hurry in order to get rid of it somehow, nor think irrelevant things during the Prayer.

وَ الَّذِ یۡنَ فِ اَمۡوَالِہِمۡ حَقٌّ مَّعۡلُ ۙ ۴ۙ۲۴

(70-24) and those in whose wealth there is a known right

لِّلسَّآئِلِ وَ الۡمَحۡرُوۡمِ ۙ۲۵ۙ

(70-25) for those that ask and those that are dispossessed, (16)

(16) In (Surah Adh-Dharuyat, Ayat 19), it has been said: In their wealth there is a right of the beggar and the needy, and here: In their wealth there is a due share of the beggar and the needy. Some people have understood this to mean that the due share implies the obligatory zakat, for in the zakat both the exemption limit and the rate have been fixed. But this commentary cannot be accepted on the ground that the Surah Al-Maarij is unanimously a Makkan Revelation, and the zakat with its specific exemption limit and rate was enjoined at Al-Madinah. Therefore, the correct meaning of the due share is that they have of their own accord set aside a share in their possessions of the beggar and needy, which they discharge regularly and honestly. This same meaning of this verse has been given by Abdullah bin Abbas, Abdullah bin Umar, Mujahid, Shabi and Ibrahim Nakhai.

Here, saail does not imply a beggar but a needy person, who asks someone for help, and mahroom implies a person who is jobless, or the one who tries to earn a living but does not earn enough to meet his needs, or the one who has become disabled because of an accident or calamity, and is unable to make a living. About such people when it becomes known that they are destitute, a God-worshipper does not wait that they should ask for help, but helps them of his own accord as soon as he comes to know that they are needy and stand in need of help. (For further explanation, (see E.N. 17 of Surah Adh-Dharuyat).

وَ الَّذِیۡنَ یُصَدِّقُوۡنَ بِیَوۡمِ الدِّیۡنِ ۙ۲۶ۙ

(70-26) those who firmly believe in the Day of Recompense, [17]

(17) “Who believe in the Day of Recompense”: Who do not think they are irresponsible but believe that one Day they will have to appear before their God and render to Him an account of their deeds.

وَ الَّذِيۡنَ ہُمۡ مِّنۡ عَذَابِ رَبِّہِمۡ مُّشۡفِقُوۡنَ ۲۷

(70-27) and fear the chastisement of their Lord [18] –

(18) In other words, they are not like the disbelievers, who do not fear God even after they have committed every heinous sin and crime and perpetrated every cruelty in the world, but they, in spite of having adopted a righteous attitude in morals and deeds as best as they could, fear God and continue to remain in constant awe lest their shortcomings should exceed their good works before Him and they should be declared as worthy of punishment. (For further explanation, see(E.N. 54 of Surah Al-Muminun), (E.N. 19 of Surah Adh-Dharuyat).

اِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّہِمۡ غَیۡرُ مَاۡمُوۡنٍ ۲۸

(70-28) surely the chastisement of their Lord is a thing none can feel secure from –

وَ الَّذِیۡنَ ہُمۡ لِفُرُوۡجِہِمۡ حٰفِظُوۡنَ ۲۹

(70-29) and those who guard their private parts, [19]

(19) “Who guard their private parts”: Who abstain from adultery as well as from nudity and exposing their private parts

before others. For explanation, see (E.N. 6 of Surah Al-Muminun), (E.Ns 30, 32 of Surah An-Noor) and (E.N. 62 of Surah Al-Ahzab).

اِلَّا عَلٰٓى اَزْوَاجِهِمْ اَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ اَيْمَانُهُمْ فَاِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُوْمِيْنَ ۝٣٠

(70-30) except in regard to their spouses and those whom their right hands possess, for in regard to them they are not reproachable, (20)

(20) For explanation, see (E.N. 7 of Surah Al-Muminun).

فَمَنِ ابْتَغٰى وَرَآءَ ذٰلِكَ فَاُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْعٰدُوْنَ ۝٣١

(70-31) but any who seeks to go beyond that, it is indeed they who are the transgressors,

وَالَّذِيْنَ هُمْ لِاَمٰنٰتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رٰعُوْنَ ۝٣٢

(70-32) and those who fulfil their trusts and their covenants, (21)

(21) “Trusts” imply those trusts which Allah has entrusted to men as well as those which one man entrusts to another because of faith and confidence. Likewise, “promises” imply those promises which man makes with his God as well as those which one man makes with another. Keeping and fulfilling both these kinds of trusts and promises is a necessary characteristic of a believer. In a Hadith Anas has reported that whenever the Prophet (peace be upon him) addressed his companions, he would always give them the instruction: Beware, the one who does not keep his trust has no faith, and one who does not fulfill his pledges, has no religion. (Baihaqi, Ash-Shuab al-Imam).

وَ الَّذِيۡ نَ ُ بِشَهٰدٰتِ ہِمۡ قَآئِمُوۡنَ ۳۳

(70-33) and those who are upright in their testimonies; (22)

(22) That is, they neither conceal evidence nor change it in any way for selfish motives.

وَ الَّذِيۡنَ ُمۡ عَلٰى صَلَاتِ ہِمۡ يُحَافِظُوۡنَ ۳۴

(70-34) and who take due care of their Prayer: (23)

(23) This gives an idea of the importance of the Prayer (salat). The description of the merits of the high and sublime character of those who have been declared as worthy of Paradise, began with the Prayer and has been concluded with it. To be a performer of the Prayer is their first characteristic, to be steadfast and ever constant with regard to the Prayer is their second characteristic, and to guard their Prayer is their last characteristic. Guarding the Prayer implies many things: to perform the Prayer at its right time, to make sure before the Prayer that one’s body and clothes are clean and pure, to have performed the ablutions and to have washed the limbs well, to perform the basic elements of the Prayer with its obligatory and desirable parts with due care and attention, to observe the requisite rites of the Prayer carefully, to avoid disobedience of God, which is destructive of the Prayer. All these are included in the guarding of the Prayer.

اُولٰٓئِكَ فِىۡ جَنّٰتٍ مُّكۡرَمُوۡنَ ۳۵

(70-35) all these shall live honorably in the Gardens.

فَمَالِ الَّذِيۡنَ كَفَرُوۡا قِبَلَكَ مُهۡطِعِيۡنَ ۳۶

(70-36) But what is the matter with the unbelievers who are hurrying towards you

عَنِ الْيَمِيْنِ وَ عَنِ الشِّمَالِ عِزِيْنَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(70-37) in crowds, both on the right and on the left? (24)

(24) This refers to those disbelievers who would rush in towards the Prophet (peace be upon him) from every side to mock and ridicule him when they heard him preach Islam and recite the Quran.

اَيَطْمَعُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِّنْهُمْ اَنْ يُّدْخَلَ جَنَّةَ نَعِيْمٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

(70-38) Does every one of them wish to enter the Garden of Bliss? (25)

(25) It means that God's Paradise is only for those righteous people whose characteristics have just been described above, Now, can these people who are not at all inclined to listen to the truth and who are rushing in towards the Prophet (peace be upon him) in order to suppress every invitation to the truth, be the candidates for Paradise? Has God prepared His Paradise only for such people as these. Here, one should also keep in view (Verses 34-41 of Surah Al-Qalam_) in which an answer has been given to this saying of the disbelievers of Makkah: Even if there is any life after death, we shall have good time there too, as we are having in the world, and the torment would befall Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his followers and not us.

كَلَّا ۭ اِنَّا خَلَقْنٰهُمْ مِّمَّا يَعْلَمُوْنَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(70-39) By no means! They know that which We have created them from. (26)

(26) Here, this sentence can have two meanings:

(1) If it is taken to be related to the preceding theme, it will mean: As for the substance these people have been created from, all men are equal. For if the substance itself be the cause of man's entry into Paradise, then the good and the bad, the wicked and the just, the guilty and the innocent, all should go to Paradise. But a little common sense is enough to decide that man's qualifications for Paradise are created not on the basis of the substance of his creation but only on the basis of his merit and excellence.

(2) If this sentence is regarded as an introduction to the following theme, it would mean: These people think they are secure from Our torment and mock the one who warns them of Our punishment, whereas We can punish them even in this world as and when We please, as well as resurrect them after death as and when We like. They themselves know that We began their creation from an insignificant sperm-drop and developed them into a living man. If they had only considered this mode of their creation, they would never have been involved in the misunderstanding that they now have escaped Our grasp, or that We have no power to create them over again.

فَلَآ ۟ اُقْسِمُ بِرَبِّ الْمَشٰرِقِ وَ الْمَغٰرِبِ اِنَّا لَقٰدِرُوْنَ ۙ۴۰

(70-40) I swear (27) by the Lord of the easts and the wests (28) that We have the power

(27) That is, the truth is not that which these people think it is.

(28) Here, Allah has sworn an oath by Himself. The words Easts and Wests have been used because the sun rises and sets at a new angle every day during the year, and goes on rising and setting successively at different times around the globe. Thus considered the Easts and the Wests are not one but many. From another point of view as against the north and the south there is a

direction of east and a direction of west. On this basis in (Surah Ash-Shuara, Ayat 28) and (Surah Al-Muzammi1, Ayat 19) the words Rabb-ulrnashriqi wal-maghrib have been used. From still another view-point the earth has two easts and two wests, for when the sun sets on one hemisphere, it rises on the other. On this basis the words Rabb-ul-mashriqayn wa Rabb-ulmaghribayn (Lord of two easts and two wests) have been used in (Surah Ar-Rahman, Ayat 17). (For further explanation, see (E.N. 17 of Surah Ar-Rahman).

عَ ى اَ نُّبَدِّلَ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَ مَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوْقِيْنَ ﴿۴۱﴾

(70-41) to replace them by others who would be better than they; and We shall certainly not be overpowered. (29)

(29) This is that for which Allah Almighty has sworn an oath of His being Lord of the Easts and Wests. It means: As We are Owners of the Easts and Wests, the whole earth is under Our control and power, and you have no power to escape Our punishment: We can destroy you as and when We like and can create another people that may be better than you.

فَذَرْهُمْ يَخُوْضُوْا وَ يَلْعَبُوْا حَتّٰى يُلٰقُوْا يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِىْ يُوْعَدُوْنَ ﴿۴۲﴾

(70-42) So leave them to engage in vain talk and to amuse themselves until they come face to face with the Day which they are promised,

يَوْمَ يَخْرُجُوْنَ مِنَ الْاَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا كَاَنَّهُمْ اِلٰى نُصُبٍ يُّوْفِضُوْنَ ﴿۴۳﴾

(70-43) the Day on which they will hastily come forth from their graves, as though they were hurrying on to the altars of their deities. (30)

(30) There is a difference of opinion among the commentators about the meaning of the word nusub. Some have interpreted it to mean idols, according to which the meaning would be: They would be racing towards the place appointed by the Lord of Resurrection as they race today towards the shrines of their idols; and some others have taken nusub to mean the goal signs which are set for the competitors in a race, so that each tries to reach and touch the appointed post before the

خٰشِعَةً اَبْصَارُهُمْ تَرْهَقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ؕ ذٰلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الَّذِىْ كَانُوْا يُوْعَدُوْنَ ﴿۴۴﴾

(70-44) Their eyes will be downcast and disgrace will overwhelm them. Such is the Day that they were promised.